

Enhance Access for Hunters and Outdoor Recreationists

Access to hunting and fishing is a primary concern of sportsmen and women, and federal lands and waters provide places where many people pursue these pastimes. In fact, the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found that 34 percent of hunters used public lands for all or some of their hunting opportunities. Yet access is repeatedly cited as one of the most important limiting factors associated with hunting participation – without having a place to go, many hunters will simply stop hunting. Similarly, a recent survey of more than 1,500 anglers by Southwick Associates found that 27 percent list access to water as the biggest problem facing fishing today.

In many instances, federal land agencies control access. Maintaining or increasing access opportunities to federal lands will ensure that hunters and anglers have somewhere to go. Investing in infrastructure that supports recreational access, acquiring or placing easements on lands that will be open for recreational access, and providing updated and easily-accessible mapping systems to make it clear where federal lands are open for access will all help reduce this barrier to participation.

Maintain robust funding for federal land roads and trails

- Increase Highway Bill funding for the Federal Lands Transportation Program and Federal Lands Access Program. Congress
- Enhance interagency cooperation between the Federal Highway Administration and other federal land management agencies to expedite and streamline funding transfers and increase cooperation and communication with state agencies. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Transportation/FHA

America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 (S. 2302) proposes funding and direction to federal land management agencies through the Federal Lands Transportation Program and Federal Lands Access Program. This provides for improved interchanges, roads, and trails on and leading to federally-managed public lands. Current annual allocations – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, \$30 million), U.S. Forest Service (USFS, \$17 million), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM, competes for a portion of \$24 million) – are inadequate to address road and bridge projects needing attention. The FWS has a backlog of repairs and improvements of \$102 million annually, and the USFS, with more than 65,000 miles of roads accessible by passenger vehicle, has more than \$3 billion in maintenance needs. Roads to and through National Park Service (NPS) parks and preserves often



provide access to other lands for recreation and hunting and must also be maintained. Funding is critical to improve safety and access to these federal lands as visitation for hunting and other recreation continues to grow.

Improve public land access databases

- Publish modern, data-rich access tools to provide better access and user experiences on federal lands. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/COE
- Fund development of modern access data tools for federal lands. Congress

Better digital maps of federal lands would greatly increase the public's ability to use these lands. Benefits of an accurate and continuously updated system include improved users' experiences, reduced resource damage, and avoidance of inadvertent illegal trespassing and activities. To address this, Congress enacted and the Department of the Interior (DOI) implemented the *John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act*. Section 4105 addresses inaccessible federal lands by directing the USFS and BLM to develop a database and priority list for lands to open for public access. In addition, DOI Secretarial Order 3356 directs BLM to develop a National Public Lands Access Geodatabase for similar purposes.

However, neither the USFS nor the BLM is currently equipped to determine where access rights exist across private lands. Many of the agencies' access easement records are held on paper files and cannot be integrated into digital mapping systems necessary for a complete evaluation of access issues. The USFS estimates it holds 37,000 recorded easements but most (32,000) have not been digitized. An effort to digitize this information must be accelerated to serve the growing availability of web-based and handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies used by the public.

Ensure land transactions enhance federal land access

- Advance land transaction programs that benefit access and habitat conservation and increase management efficiencies including FLTFA, *Small Tracts Act* amendment, and BLM and USFS land-adjustment legislation. Congress; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS
- Allocate the public access share of LWCF funding to priority rights-of-way and parcels that create access to land-locked federal lands. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS

The sportsmen and women community's staunch support for keeping federal lands open includes support for trading or selling small and low value tracts of BLM and national forest lands in exchange for high value additions to the federal land system. Properties that provide little to no benefit for access or wildlife habitat can also create management inefficiencies. In order to more efficiently and cost effectively manage the federal estate, and to benefit access and habitat conservation, agencies have authorities through the *Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act* (FLTFA), *Small Tracts Act* amendment, and USFS land-adjustment legislation for the sale of federal lands with low

conservation and access values. Revenues generated by the sale of these lands are used for acquisition of high priority lands, particularly those that improve opportunities for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting, and to conserve wildlife habitat.

Additionally, permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 2019 dedicated 3 percent or a minimum of \$15 million annually for securing public access. This funding should be allocated to acquiring rights-of-way and parcels that open land-locked federal lands.

